

**John H. Glenn, Jr. Oral History Interview, 6/12/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** John H. Glenn, Jr.  
**Interviewer:** Walter D. Sohler  
**Date of Interview:** June 12, 1964  
**Place of Interview:** Seabrook, Texas  
**Length:** 26 pages, 1 addendum

**Biographical Note**

Glenn, a Project Mercury astronaut (1959-1964) and pilot of the *Friendship 7* space capsule (1962), discusses his conversations with John F. Kennedy about the Mercury program and the larger space program; the astronauts' contract with *Life* magazine and other business dealings; and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson's role in the space program, among other issues.

**Access Restrictions**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed November 15, 1977, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

John H. Glenn, Jr., recorded interview by Walter D. Sohler, June 12, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

JJK

AGREEMENT ON USE OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I, John H. Glenn, Jr., Colonel, U.S.M.C. (Ret.), of Seabrook, Texas, assign to the United States of America for administration by the John F. Kennedy Library, Inc., all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted with me at Seabrook, Texas, by Mr. Walter D. Sohler on behalf of the John F. Kennedy Library, on June 12, 1964.

Subject to any conditions specified by me limiting access to those materials and set forth in writing on the transcript prior to its being forwarded for the Library, such transcript and recording may be made available for research, dissemination, reproduction, publication and other appropriate use, in whole or in part, as determined by the Director of the Library.

(signed) John H. Glenn, Jr.  
(date) 9 March 1965

Accepted:  
(signed) Walter D. Sohler  
(date) May 12, 1965

John H. Glenn, Jr.

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Meeting with John F. Kennedy (JFK) on February 5, 1962 before the Mercury-Atlas 6 flight
2	Ceremonies after the Mercury-Atlas 6 flight
5, 25	JFK's thoughts on the space program
7	Astronauts' contract with <i>Life</i> magazine
10	Astronauts' business investments
12	Astronaut speaking tours and public appearances
16	Speaking with JFK about running for political office
17	Lyndon B. Johnson's role in the space program
21	Sailing with the Kennedys at Hyannis Port
23	Possibility of joint Soviet-U.S. spaceflight

Oral History Interview

with

Lt. Col. John H. Glenn, Jr.

June 12, 1964  
Seabrook, Texas

By Walter D. Sohier

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SOHIER: This is the beginning of an interview with Colonel John H. Glenn, Jr., in connection with the oral history project of the John F. Kennedy Library. We are seated here in Colonel Glenn's home in Seabrook, Texas, which is about a mile or two, I guess, from the site of the Manned Spacecraft Center, on June 12, 1964. Maybe we could begin, Colonel Glenn, with some discussion of your first encounters with President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. The record we have here shows a visit to the White House on February 5, 1962, prior to the MA-6 flight. Can you detail this a bit? Did you meet him before that, incidentally?

GLENN: No, I believe that was the first time I had met the President. I had seen him several times before that, but I think that was the first time we had actually met and it was a very cordial time. Of course, that was during the preparation period for the orbital flight of Friendship 7, and I had come home over a weekend to be with Annie [Anna C. Glenn] and the children [Carolyn Ann Glenn; John David Glenn] in Arlington. We weren't getting much family time, in those days, and the President sent word out that he would like for me to stop by the White House before I went back to the Cape—Cape Canaveral at that time, Cape Kennedy now—and so I did, of course, and it was just a very cordial get-together. He just wanted to talk about what was planned on the flight and I went into some of the details of what we expected to experience. In fact, later on after the flight when I came back, he recalled quite a number of these things I had said in this preflight

meeting on the 5th of February. Most of the things that we had expected in space flight were encountered and he recalled these all very accurately. He evidently had remembered all the things we talked about that day—the 5th of February.

SOHIER: What kind of thing do you have in mind? Were these sort of technical problems?

GLENN: Yes, he was interested very much in the anticipated G level during launch; what kind of sensations we expected during launch; what kind of control we had over the booster during launch; were we actually going to drive

[-1-]

it like we did an airplane or were we pretty much at the mercy of the guidance systems until we were in orbit. Problems of that nature—what pressures we would be operating under; what we would do if the pressure in the spacecraft failed. He was interested in real detail.

SOHIER: Did he talk about the safety aspect and seek your judgment as to whether the thing ought to go at this point in time?

GLENN: Yes, he was concerned about this. He brought up whether we felt very personally every possible thing had been done to ensure our safety and I told him that when we first came into the program one of the things we were told, by Dr. Gilruth [Robert R. Gilruth], was that we had veto control over anything that was to occur on the project. That at any time we, as experienced test pilots, saw something going on that we didn't like or there was an area that we thought needed more testing or anything that we weren't satisfied with, to let him know. Also, that any time we didn't feel right about going, he didn't want us to go. The President thought that was an excellent way to conduct such a project.

SOHIER: Did he go into the reasons that he wanted to ask you these questions, the reason for his concern as to the fact that perhaps he was getting some flak on the safety issue? Was there any discussion of that sort?

GLENN: No. I was aware that he had been getting some questions on this, of course, and I knew of his interest in that context, but I don't think it was mainly that. I didn't get the impression that he was looking for material to refute anyone's criticism of him. I took it, and I think he meant it, as an interest in one human being to another—as one “guy” to another, if you will, if you can put the President in that context.

SOHIER: Yes. Now, your flight, I guess, was February 20, wasn't it? There were ceremonies after that at the Cape which he went down to, I think.

[-2-]

GLENN: Yes.

SOHIER: Are there any details of that which stand out? It must have been difficult to remember the details.

GLENN: Those were some extremely eventful periods and it's hard to recall all the things that did happen there, of course. The first contact following the flight was when I had a call from him on board the destroyer after I was picked up. I appreciated that very much. He just wanted to tell me how much the way the whole thing had come off meant to him personally and the country and so on. He said that he would see us at the Cape, I believe. We completed our debriefing in a couple of days at Grand Turk Island and then flew back in with Vice President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] to Patrick Air Force Base. That's where I got back together again with the family, and then we had the parade out to the Cape. The President flew to the Cape in Air Force One for the presentation of the NASA award and for the other ceremonies.

There is an event there that might be of personal interest—an event that I appreciated very much. As he came down the ramp from Air Force One at the Cape, the honor guard was there, and we went through the honor guard with him. Then he started off across to another area a couple of hundred feet away. The security wasn't very good on the Cape that day as far as crowd control was concerned (I don't know how many people were there but it was probably several thousand), and it sort of got out of hand. There were people milling all around. He was right in the middle of the whole thing and he realized we weren't going to be able to get to where he had started to go. We turned and started back and I was still with him. The band, back near the airplane, which had been playing "Hail to the Chief" and various things, started playing "The Marine Hymn." As we walked along, the President said, "Isn't that 'The Marine Hymn' they're playing?" and I said, "Yes, it is." He said, "What do you normally do when they play 'The Marine Hymn'?" and I said, "Well, as a loyal Marine, I normally stand at attention." He said, "That's what I thought," and he stopped and stood at attention

[ -3 - ]

himself and I stood beside him. The people milling around didn't know what this was all about. We just stood there motionless during the time. We stood there until they completed "The Marine Hymn" and then we moved on off. I told the Commandant about this when I got back to Washington, and he appreciated this very much, too. It's one of those little human things that you appreciate very much and it showed the type of consideration and thoughtfulness he had for other people.

SOHIER: Yes. Were there any other aspects of the ceremonies down there that stand out?

GLENN: Oh, there were many. He wanted to see the Cape; he wanted to go around to the different parts of the Cape and see the gantry and some of these things. We presented him with a missile hat down there and I know he wasn't much for putting on Indian headdresses and things like this...

SOHIER: The President has to be careful about these things.

GLENN: ...but we presented him with this missile hat and he took that with him. It was presented down at Launch Pad 14, my launch site. He was curious about all the different things at the Cape. We visited the Control Center, and Chris Kraft [Christopher Columbus Kraft, Jr.], who had been running the Control Center all the time I was in orbit, gave him a rundown on the various aspects of the Control Center and what everyone did. He was very interested in this, and particularly he was interested in meeting all the different people who had had a personal part to play in the whole flight—Walt Williams [Walter Williams], Chris Kraft, Al Shepard [Alan B. Shepard], Carl Huss [Carl R. Huss], and Tec Roberts [Tecwyn Roberts], some of these people in the Control Center who had played a very personal part in making sure that everything had gone right during the flight.

SOHIER: You saw him then, I guess, a number of times in connection with the other Mercury flights, either at the Cape or, I guess, at the ceremonies in Washington, when you all came in.

[-4-]

GLENN: Yes.

SOHIER: Were there any outstanding features to these visits in connection with Project Mercury flights that tell us about, let's say, his attitude toward Project Mercury, our space program, its importance—these kinds of things?

GLENN: There was one thing we might catch that he got a big kick out of—he seemed to, anyway—and that was the incident when we went to Washington from Cape Canaveral. I had left Cape Canaveral following the ceremonies there and the presentation of the medal. We went down for a weekend at Key West to sort of get away from it all, and then we came back up to Palm Beach and rode back to Washington with the President on Air Force One. I don't know whether you might recall the incident of Caroline's [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] comment. She had evidently heard about all these space flights and about the monkeys going on the space flights. When we came up to Air Force One at Palm Beach, ready to come back to Washington with the President, Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] brought Caroline up to meet me and, as we were introduced, Caroline curtsied and then she looked up and said, "Where's the monkey?" I was supposed to address the joint session of Congress later that day and I had my speech with me, so I put some notes in about that incident to use in the speech. While we were on the way to Washington I asked the President to look at the speech and to see if he would have any objection to my using this little incident about Caroline and he laughed and laughed. He got a big kick out of that and said no, he would be glad for us to go ahead and use it.

SOHIER: What other discussions did you have in connection with Mercury flights at these various times? What was the importance that he placed on Project Mercury;



what was it doing for the country, in his opinion?

GLENN: I think perhaps his attitude toward the whole project changed a little bit as time went on. I think early in the program, from statements I have read and from personal remarks when we were together, that he saw it originally as more of a competitive thing with the Russians.

[-5-]

That we couldn't let them best us in this scientific field. Period. This, of course, is one phase of the program. However, those of us in the program have felt that the program is completely worthwhile even if there was no such place as Russia, just on the basis of being an exploration and research capability. I think his statements and his feelings on this came more around to the latter as time went on. I can't think of any specific remarks that reflected this but I think that in general the tone of his thought was along that line—that he saw the thing not only as a space race but as the worthwhile exploration that it is.

He was interested in the whole program, not just in specifics on an individual flight, as I mentioned earlier. He was interested in where one part of the project led on to another. In other words, he was interested in what followed beyond my flight and what we would do that's different on the next flight. Were they just to be repeat flights to prove what we had done before or were we going on to new things on each flight? He was interested in what those new things were, and asked very detailed questions about them and about follow-on projects. At one time I remember we discussed in some detail whether we really needed a Gemini project or not—whether we couldn't go just straight from Project Mercury on to Project Apollo without the interim project of Gemini.

SOHIER: What did you then say to him on that?

GLENN: At that time this was debatable because Project Apollo was close enough on the time schedule we could foresee then, that it was very questionable whether we needed Project Gemini or not. There was some feeling that we could use hardware that was in the development stage for Apollo to get the extended weightlessness and rendezvous experience that was being set up as design objectives for Gemini. There was much more development work to be done on Apollo, however, so the chance of major delays was greater if the decision went that direction. It was decided, and probably correctly, that the most expeditious method was to help work out problems with the more easily procurable Gemini, and then go on to Apollo.

[-6-]

SOHIER: Does this tie in at all to more Mercury flights? You remember after the Cooper [Gordon Cooper] flight there was some controversy as to whether another flight was desirable and I think it was suggested, in the newspapers anyway, that some of you talked to the President about this directly. Is there any detail on this that you could tell us about?

GLENN: I'm afraid you will have to leave me out of that one because I was the only astronaut not in on that conversation. The others did talk to him. During Gordo's flight I had been on the tracking ship off the southern coast of Japan, which was in the area where he was to retrofire. When I came back to Japan following his flight, my family came out and I took ten days' leave and stayed out there for a short tour of Japan. So when the other fellows talked to him about whether there should be another Mercury flight or not, I wasn't in on that conversation.

SOHIER: I see. This raises an interesting aspect, I guess, of your relationship with the President. The ability to deal directly because of his acquaintance with you and interest in the program and in you personally. Maybe we could move from Project Mercury, then, into one area where I do believe you talked directly, to him. This was the question of a contract covering your personal story, continuation of the contract with *Life* magazine. I wonder if you could discuss some of this. Let me just by way of putting in the context say that sometime—I think it was in the spring of 1962—I had a brief conversation with the President, in which he made it very clear his mind was made up that there would not be, in his administration, a *Life* contract with the astronauts. He was very firm in his belief on this and yet, on August 24, 1962, there was a meeting with the President on this subject and he went along with NASA's recommendation that the policy which had existed before the Kennedy Administration be continued, so his thinking changed considerably in that period. Could you give us some of the reasons for that?

GLENN: I can tell you what I know about it. I don't know what effect my conversations with him had, but I

[-7-]

know I can tell you just what occurred. During the early summer of '62, my family and I were invited by the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy] and Mrs. Kennedy [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] to come up to Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, to be their guests over a weekend. We went and had a wonderful time. On one of the days, we had finished water-skiing and swimming, and were on the fantail of the *Honey Fitz*, the Kennedy yacht. The President brought up the subject of our *Life* contract and what did I think of this, and what did I think of the fact that they had refused this?

So I went into some of the details of why we had had the contract to begin with and what the contract actually consisted of, which was generally misunderstood at that time, and still is, as far as that goes. But we went into some detail of how the contract did not cover experiences from the space flight, that the contract covered permitting the *Life* people to talk to our families, our children, and us—in other words, it gave them access to our homes. How do these people live and what was their childhood background? What do they think? What do they do when they go to church? What do they do when they play with the kids? What do they do when they go to the swimming pool? In other words, the little personal day-to-day family life and activity was the only thing that was for sale on this contract and that's the only thing that has remained for sale on this. It's just been the personal background story, not

the story of the flight. Well, he hadn't understood this in this vein at all and I explained this very carefully, and that that was the only thing that was for sale—that I was as much as anyone against selling what we were actually doing on the flights themselves, and if anyone could show me anywhere we ever held back one iota of information that we gained on a flight to give to any particular person, I'd like to know about it. That information has been open to everyone on just as full a measure as it has been to *Life*. I'd be happy to give back any money I had received if anyone could show me where I had withheld anything from other press conferences or interviews. We had just drained every bit of information that we could and given it to everyone, anyone that asked for it.

[ -8 - ]

SOHIER: In this conversation did he mention General Eisenhower's [Dwight D. Eisenhower] book, *Crusade in Europe*, as being an example of the kind of thing that he felt perhaps ought not to lead to being able to sell the story? He mentioned this at the time that I had talked to him. I wondered whether he continued that line of thought.

GLENN: I don't remember that one specifically, no. He mentioned a number of cases of people in government that he thought had taken strictly their government experiences and had profited by them when they should not have, and I don't remember the ones now that he recalled. I recall that there were quite a number of these that apparently he didn't care for at all, but I don't know which ones they were.

We discussed this for probably 20 minutes to half an hour. We went into all phases of it: how this had worked out during my flight; how through this we had been able to control some of the press activities with the family because we did have this contract; of course, to put it on a crass commercial basis this thing had been very good in that it guaranteed that I could give my children the education that I wanted to give them. So, from a strictly personal standpoint, I was all for it and thought it had worked to our advantage and to NASA's and the government's in the way we had handled it; and, if we could just get across to people the idea that this was not a sale of our experiences in flight, I thought this would be generally accepted.

SOHIER: In the August 24 meeting, the group that went over from NASA—Walter Lingle [Walter L. Lingle, Jr.], John Johnson [John A. Johnson], and Richard Callaghan [Richard L. Callaghan]—discussed with Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] and the President this very point, and one of the things he brought out was the fact that by virtue of your status as astronauts you had expenses over and above what you would have had but for your fame, and that this was an additional reason for going along with this. Did he discuss this? Was this one of your arguments with him?

[ -9 - ]

GLENN: I think he asked me if we had had additional expenses and I told him yes, there had been some additional expenses. They weren't tremendous but there had

been some. If you're in the public eye all the time and your family is being looked at, naturally you buy a few more clothes for the family and you take them along with you sometimes to some of these big events that you're going to, but their way is not being paid so you pay it yourself. If you're invited to the White House for some big event or a social get-together of some kind, you want your wife to be as well-dressed as anyone else, so she buys a new formal she wouldn't have otherwise. Plus I had bought a couple of extra suits that I probably wouldn't have had, which were extra expenses, so we had had extra expenses that he was curious about.

Following our conversation about all this *Life* contract, I remember very clearly he turned—sort of to end the whole conversation—to the Attorney General, Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], and said words to the effect that “maybe we ought to reconsider this whole thing again.” Those weren't the exact words but this was the gist of the conversation. So I don't know whether that was the event that triggered off a whole reconsideration of this or not, but I gathered later on that it probably was, because it wasn't long after that before it was brought up and reconsidered again.

SOHIER: One related subject, of course, stemming from the fact of the *Life* contract was that there was money to invest and the personal business affairs of all of you got into the newspapers from time to time, and, again at this August 24 meeting, the President did express some concern. I think McGeorge Bundy was there also. They expressed concern about some method of tighter control or something over the investments that you all were involved in. Did this come up in your discussion or did you ever talk to him about this?

GLENN: Yes, I think it did. I don't recall specifically our conversation in this regard, no. I know he was very interested in making sure that we weren't being used for promotional purposes by someone else.

[-10-]

SOHIER: The Houston houses deal, I think, was around that time.

GLENN: Well, I was just trying to recall whether that occurred then and whether that was one of the things that were discussed. It was discussed later on with him, I know, but I'm not sure that that occurred up there at Hyannis Port.

SOHIER: Did you discuss it later on with him?

GLENN: Yes—let's see, when was that? Because he brought up the subject of the Houston homes...

SOHIER: It was sometime before August 24 of 1962, because he mentioned that at the meeting. It may have been, then, at Hyannis Port or at some other time.

GLENN: It may have been; maybe it was at that same time. We, the astronauts, as

individuals pretty much stayed out of all that. I believe it was Congressman Teague [Olin E. Teague] who told one of the home builders from here that “the astronauts are coming down to Houston now and you want to be sure and take good care of these fellows on their homes.” This triggered off a whole chain of events that got completely out of hand. It wound up with the Home Builders Association here all chipping in, sort of on a community-wide basis, to give us free and clear these homes over in Sharpstown, in southwest Houston.

SOHIER: Hospitality Texas style, I guess!

GLENN: That’s right. Well, we at first thought we should turn these down, because we didn’t want to get caught up in any promotion scheme promoting a certain area of Houston or anything like that. Then Leo DeOrsey, our attorney, looked into this and it turned out that this was from the whole Houston Home Builders Association. It appeared to him that there were enough people involved so that no one particular person was going to benefit by our being there. After having sweat over this for, I guess,

[-11-]

several weeks, he finally decided that this would probably be all right. Now, he had asked advice from several government agencies on this and didn’t get a turndown from anyone. Everyone was sort of noncommittal on it and had no real objection to it until he accepted, and, as soon as he accepted the offer that we would take the homes...

SOHIER: ...the roof fell in!

GLENN: Then the roof fell in, that’s right. Everything came apart, so, after a lot of very, very unfavorable press and criticism from various government agencies and so on, it turned out that the best thing to do, to save any further embarrassment for everybody, was just to turn the whole thing down and get out as best we could, and that’s what Leo did.

SOHIER: Did the President express any philosophy in this whole area of where you draw the line, or was he just pointing out that there were problems that needed attention?

GLENN: No, I think his main concern was that we weren’t being exploited by someone for their own private benefit. This was my general impression of it anyway.

SOHIER: I guess you had a lot of speaking engagements while you were with NASA. You went on a foreign tour. Could you go into whether the President discussed getting you around the country and meeting people? We might even go from this into your interest in politics—did he ever talk to you about that subject?

GLENN: On the speaking engagements and the touring afterwards, he wanted some sort

of policy set up after the flight as to how we were to be used on speaking and tours and things like that. We felt that, to get the most benefit from the flight, we should put this information back into the program as quickly and as rapidly as we possibly could and make as many contacts with the engineering people that had contributed to the whole project and to scientific

[-12-]

groups that were interested in this. We shouldn't let them down and go off on big speaking tours and so on just glad-handing with the public and accepting the kudos more or less. He agreed with this—that we wanted to make sure we got the maximum input back into the program.

Right after the flight it was suggested that I make tours to Europe and some other places, much as the Russian cosmonauts had done and are still doing, and we felt that going out just specifically to say, "Here I am, clap for me, and give me the flowers and the medal," as had been done, was sort of a hollow-type gesture. We thought that our time could best be spent getting the information back into the program and getting on with advances in the program. He agreed with this. He thought that we should get around this country as much as possible and get in touch with as many people here in different settings as we could, which we did to a degree. I don't know whether it was as much as he had hoped we would do or not. My Japanese visit was one that he had some connection with after the thing was over. I was out in Japan for Gordo Cooper's flight, as I mentioned, and since I was already there we decided this was a good opportunity to see Japan. I wanted my family to see Japan, so I took ten days' leave following Gordo's flight, stayed out there, and had Annie and the kids fly out at our own expense. USIA [United States Information Agency] asked me while we were there if we would mind talking to some of the groups for the government and so on for a couple of days in Tokyo, and meeting some of the government officials and so on. I agreed to this; this was fine even though we were officially on leave and were there at our own expense.

So, when I came back and met the family in Tokyo, we stayed at the embassy with Ambassador and Mrs. Reischauer [Edwin O. Reischauer; Haru M. Reischauer]. They had organized the first couple of days back in Tokyo, during which we met the Crown Prince [Akihito], the Prime Minister [Ikeda Hayato], the Foreign Minister, and many, many government officials right down the line. There were also meetings with scientific groups and newspaper groups, TV, radio, science writers, and so on. It was obvious after the first couple of days in

[-13-]

Japan that our reception was going to be more than we had anticipated. You couldn't believe it. We knew that there would be some excitement about us being in there, but we had no idea of the extent to which this would be carried. It was obvious after the first day or so around Tokyo that wherever we went in Japan it was going to be an official function, period, whether we wanted it to be or not. After the first couple of days, we started our tour down through Japan. There were lots of little incidents and things that we could relate on that, but,

to summarize the whole tour, we did have a wonderful time. We lived in the Japanese inns, we ate with nothing but chopsticks, and things like that. This got such a tremendous play in Japan and became such a big thing in the Japanese press that it rather became a ten day official visit of Japan whether we liked it or not. We had some vacation, but I suppose probably two-thirds or three-fourths of our time was actually spent working for the government while we were there, in various capacities.

We came back for the last couple of days in Tokyo and this once again was a round of minute-by-minute scheduling and received considerable attention in Tokyo. After we had come home, Ambassador Reischauer sent a very glowing telegram back to the State Department and to the President concerning what we had accomplished while we were there, as far as our relationship with Japan had gone. He was quite laudatory in what he said about how the whole family had gone over in Japan. The President then learned that we had done this on our own expense and his reaction to this we appreciated very much. He had the government reimburse us for Annie and the children flying to Japan and back, since the way it had turned out it wasn't really a vacation. It turned into sort of an official visit to Japan for the whole family.

I talked to him one time after that and he was very pleased with the way things had worked out and hoped that we could work into some of these visits to other countries, too, later on, because this had been so well received in Japan. I had talked to him about possibly doing some of these other trips, or we had proposed this, and he had thought this was a good idea shortly before his death.

[-14-]

SOHIER: In terms of your speaking in this country and getting around and seeing people, what were the objectives that he had in mind, do you feel?

GLENN: Well, I think there were a couple of purposes there, really. One, he knew that this was having a big effect on the youth, the young people, some of the college-age people, and the high school-age young people. He wanted us to get together with those people as much as possible more or less on an inspirational basis, I think, if we can put it on that basis.

On the other hand, I think he was enough of a practical politician that he realized the attractiveness of this space program from a political sense, too, and the more we got around the country the more support there would be for the program, so he looked at it from a dual role, I think.

SOHIER: You say "inspirational." What was he trying to inspire the youth toward? Was this in terms of science and technology, or was it more a question of "we're getting soft"?

GLENN: Both, I think. He was interested in seeing that we did have a lot of young people getting into the science and technology end of things, becoming interested in that field, because he felt the country needed many young people interested in this area. He felt, too, that the tremendous interest in us as individuals could be turned to a

good influence. I remember he commented favorably in regard to my being associated with the Boy Scouts. He felt it gave the kids somebody to sort of pattern toward, or something like that.

SOHIER: Did he tie this in with the physical fitness program, the juvenile delinquency problems? Did he ever talk about these sorts of things with you?

GLENN: Not just laying it out as a plan, no. I don't remember that we ever discussed any of it just as a plan of "here's what you should do," but, after we had gone ahead and had done some of these things with the Scouts and

[-15-]

so on, he was very happy that these things had occurred the way they had. He seemed to be very much for that part of the program.

SOHIER: One thing that he said to me once about a year ago was that he thought it would be a great mistake if you were used on any future flights, because you were such an important asset to this country, I think in the very respect we are talking about here, the inspirational aspect. Did he ever talk to you about this at all?

GLENN: I don't know what kind of a national asset I am. [Laughter] Not in words like that, no. He questioned me about whether I would be used on more than one flight, and I told him that I assumed that I would—that no one was assigned to specific flights at that time, but that we assume that everyone could be used again on other flights, but he never went into it any further.

SOHIER: He didn't argue the point or say that he thought it would be a terrible mistake? He said that to me two or three times.

GLENN: I don't recall that that ever came up, no. After his death, Mrs. Kennedy told me of some of his statements to her about my future and how he hoped I would be interested in continuing public service.

SOHIER: Did he ever talk to you about running for the Senate in Ohio?

GLENN: No, we never discussed that directly.

SOHIER: Did he talk about politics as a career?

GLENN: Yes. I remember he said, once, that he hoped that sometime when I was out of the space program I would consider politics. At that time I hadn't made up my mind at all in this area.

[-16-]



SOHIER: Did he ask you whether you were a Republican or a Democrat?

GLENN: Yes, he sure did! [Laughter] I told him I was an Independent. [Laughter] I had discussed the possibilities of some of the politics with the Attorney General, with Bob Kennedy, and some of the people now misunderstand that, too. I have received a lot of mail concerning how Bob had influenced me to get into politics and, actually, if the truth is known, the last time I talked to him before I made my decision he recommended that I *not* run.

SOHIER: It was quoted in the paper, I think, that he said, "Well, don't run if you don't think you can win." [Laughter] What about Vice President Johnson's role with the astronauts in a general sense? Did you have a lot of dealings with him? As you will remember, at the very outset of the Kennedy Administration, the President designated the Vice President to be a key man in the whole space program and, in fact, he made him the Chairman of the Space Council [National Aeronautics and Space Council] by an amendment to the Space Act. Did you find that there were a lot of matters of a general nature or specific kinds of things that you talked to the Vice President about, that he dealt with you personally on, called you in on?

GLENN: We had a number of dealings with him, many on an unofficial basis. There were a number of events where various people representing various phases of the space program were present. These were at social functions or things like that and we were with the Vice President a number of times at these things. As far as day-to-day working in meetings discussing official things about where the space program was going, we had very little contact with the Space Council directly, or with the Vice President.

SOHIER: I guess he rode with you in New York at the ticker-tape parade?

GLENN: Yes. We were with the then-Vice President and Mrs. Johnson [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson] on several occasions. He came out to

[-17-]

Grand Turk and we came back with him in the airplane to Patrick Air Force Base following the flight. Then we were with him in Washington and in New York and saw him on a number of occasions. In fact, just before we left Washington we had the Vice President and Mrs. Johnson at our home for dinner, and had a very good time.

SOHIER: There was some talk in the press when you were up in New York at the ticker-tape parade that the Vice President was most anxious to get in on that parade because it was a great symbol of space, and so on. Are there any anecdotes about that?

GLENN: No, we had a very pleasant time with them every time we were together. I know

there was some criticism of him at the time, I think from some of the opposite political quarter, about some of these appearances at various events every time, but I certainly didn't look at it that way. I appreciated his thoughtfulness and the President's in taking the time and the effort to be with us on those occasions. I thought it was fine myself.

SOHIER: What about the visit of Cosmonaut Gherman S. Titov to this country? I believe you squired him around during his visit?

GLENN: Yes, I did. That was a very interesting couple of days we spent with the Titovs [Tamara Titov] and with all their entourage they had with them here, and the President was very interested in all this. He met Titov at the White House. We talked for a little while with the President and he was interested, in particular, in any areas of mutual experience that we had had, or where our observations and theirs were similar or dissimilar.

There were a number of things that happened during the Titovs' visit here. We both gave papers at a COSPAR [Committee on Space Research] meeting in Washington. Later, Dr. Dryden [Hugh Latimer Dryden] and myself, and Titov and Blagonravov [Anatoli A. Blagonravov] were on a TV show that was different from the usual panel show. The President was interested in our reaction to all of these things.

[-18-]

I think there was one event, though, from which he got a big kick. At least he laughed and laughed when I told him about it. The Titovs had been invited to our home for dinner the second evening they were here. This had been turned down, through the embassy, because their schedule was very busy. But the same evening they had been invited to our home, there was a reception at the Russian embassy and we went to this reception for the Titovs. As we came to the end of the receiving line one of the people from our State Department met me and asked me if anyone had told me that they [the Titovs] had just accepted our dinner invitation to our home—this at 6:30 in the evening—and they were planning to leave the embassy at 7 to come to our home. Well, needless to say, there had been no preparation made, since the dinner invitation had been previously declined. I took Annie and Louise Shepard [Louise Brewer Shepard], who was also there with Al, and away we went to Arlington as rapidly as we could, to get things squared away for the impending dinner party a half hour later. Bart Fugler, from NASA Headquarters, who was handling security, came out with us and he called the Arlington police for additional security people. They immediately sent a motorcycle detail. We sent the first ones who arrived off to the Seven Eleven market after frozen peas for the dinner and some other accessories that we needed. Annie meanwhile canvassed the neighborhood for frozen steaks that we could grill over charcoal.

I meanwhile started the fire in two charcoal burners. To help us out timewise, I brought out a couple of little electric fans to help get the charcoal started. Well, this worked to perfection. In fact, too well, for it wasn't very many minutes until I had a fire going that was like the village smithy's forge. I could just about have melted steel in the fire that we had. Meanwhile, Annie and Louise kicked off their shoes and were hard at work. They were

thawing steaks in the oven and were making salad. I threw the steaks onto the grill over the charcoal fire, and in a few seconds they started dripping and making some flame. I went in the house to get water to control the fire, and

[-19-]

when I came back there were flames about three feet high. I threw on the water, which made steam, and with the smoke already there it filled up the little covered back porch. The smoke was running out from under the eaves, into the house, and all over the place. I dragged the two charcoal burners out onto the carport. The smoke started coming out from under the eaves of the carport in enough volume that it looked as though the house was on fire.

Just about this time the little forge that holds the grill on top of one of the charcoal burners broke, and dumped a load of steaks in the fire. This made more smoke and I threw on more water, which made more steam, which made a rather spectacular sight in our carport. Everything was pretty much in turmoil and just at that moment the big black limousines pull up and the Russian visitors step out and start up the driveway! So I met them on the driveway and told them we had been caught with a little short notice, and if they expected to get anything to eat here they'd have to pitch in and help. Titov took his coat off and helped me with the barbecue. The Russian general with them, Nikolai Petrovich Kamanin, went in the house with Titov's wife, Tamara. The next time I saw Tamara, she had her shoes off and was helping Annie and Louise with the salad.

As it turned out we had a very enjoyable evening. When I told them later in the evening that I thought we had probably set the cause of diplomatic relations back about 50 years, they disagreed and seemed to enjoy the visit. I recounted all this to the President later on and he laughed heartily over this. He really got a big kick out of it.

SOHIER: While we're on the sort of lighter aspects, can you remember any other anecdotes involving the President and, let's say, his sense of humor, which was terrific? Are there any particular things that come to mind, any amusing little vignettes? You visited at the Cape and you had dinner at the White House a few times. Is this the extent of the social contact?

[-20-]

GLENN: Yes, we did. I don't recall any specific things now. He was always very pleasant and there were always a lot of jokes or little things. I think every time I saw him after this recounting of the barbecue incident at home, at some time while I was there, he would ask me if I had had any barbecues recently.

When we went up to the Cape [Hyannis Port] for the weekend we weren't aware that the President and Mrs. Kennedy were going to be there. I remember the way we learned. Ethel Kennedy suggested we go sailing. Well, I knew that they had a fairly large sailboat, the *Victura*. I had never been out in one like that. I had never sailed a boat of that type, so I didn't feel qualified to take it out in the 25- or 30-knot wind blowing this particular day. Ethel said, "No, no, that's all right. We'll go sailing; we can take care of it all right." So we changed clothes and went down. It was a blustery, blowing day. Well, when my family

walked from the house down toward the dock with Ethel, we could see someone working on the *Victura*. They were wearing leather jackets and old clothes, and as we got out toward the end of the dock it became a little more apparent who these people were. It was the President and Mrs. Kennedy, rigging the sails. Any doubts I had had about sailing in that weather were somewhat alleviated. I felt that if he could go out that day, it would probably be all right for us to venture out. They brought the boat in from its mooring and we went aboard. We had seven or eight people in the boat and had a lot of fun cruising around the bay. It was quite a windy day. There was enough force on the tiller that the President didn't want to strain his back, so Dave, my son, who had never sailed a boat like that before, became the helmsman and the President gave him the word on what to do. So Dave had some pretty expert instruction, back and forth across the harbor at Hyannis Port. The President seemed to enjoy it as much as we did, and that was considerable I assure you.

SOHIER: You mentioned the President's back, and one is led to believe that he was in pain a great deal of the time

[-21-]

but very seldom was it evident and he certainly never talked about it very much. Did anything involving his back ever come to your attention?

GLENN: No, just that one time. I remember Dave had to brace his feet and really pull on the tiller to keep things under control this particular day, and the President would give him instructions as to what direction he wanted to go and exactly how to handle things. That pulling on the tiller, though, was apparently more than he thought he should do.

The following day we went swimming off the *Honey Fitz* [the Kennedy yacht] while it was anchored in the bay. I remember I was surprised when he dived from the yacht deck, which was some seven or eight feet above water level.

SOHIER: Yes. While we're talking on the subject of courage, I think one aspect of the President's character that has been noted was his great respect for people with great war records—for example, people who have proven themselves as courageous in one way or another. You may remember that at the time of the Billie Sol Estes matter, he defended Secretary Orville Freeman [Orville L. Freeman] at his press conference, and the main thing he mentioned was his war record, how he had half his jaw shot off, and how a guy with that kind of record obviously was a guy that you could have confidence in.

It seems to me that his tremendous interest in the space program, his personal interest in you and other astronauts, is related to this very point. Is there any aspect of this that comes to mind in terms of the President's character this respect?

GLENN: As you say, he was very interested in these areas. He was curious about my background in combat, not so much in World War II but mainly in Korea,

where we got into jet air-to-air combat for the first time. He was interested in how this had all worked out and what things were like along the Yalu and so on. He seemed to be

[-22-]

interested in details of what happened, both in combat and in space flight. For instance, he wanted to know about things that occurred on a space flight—what I saw, what things looked like, how I felt during reentry, was it hot or wasn't it hot, how did I feel when it banged down on the water, how did it feel when I got out. He seemed to be more interested in what had occurred on a personal experience basis rather than the scientific details of the event. What did it feel like to me as a man, more than...

SOHIER: ...as a symbol?

GLENN: Well, perhaps as a symbol, but I was thinking more of the technical details of what's happening to you and the spacecraft, such as blood pressure, temperature, and the data we've been trying to get back. He didn't seem to be as interested in that type detail as he was in the personal experience—how did it feel and what did I think about at various times.

SOHIER: One theme that came out in his Inaugural Address and went all the way through his various statements on space was the business of cooperation with the Russians. There have been various suggestions of American and Russian astronauts doing something together. Did he ever discuss this subject with you?

GLENN: Just briefly. I'm almost certain that his remarks at the UN [United Nations], which triggered the comment on cooperation, were misunderstood to a degree. I think he intended that cooperation with the Russians in manned space flight would have to start at a fairly low level and work step-by-step to a broader program. I think the way it was presented at the UN was misunderstood and people immediately assumed that all at once we were going to have Russian cosmonauts and American astronauts flying in the same cockpit, possibly in the very, very immediate future. Well, there are many problem areas that would have to be worked out at a much lower level—just such things as what kind of body sensors, EKG, electrocardiogram pickups and other equipment are going

[-23-]

to be used, how we are going to send telemetry signals, what parameters you are trying to measure, to begin with. There are a thousand and one things that would have to be worked out. Just the language barrier is a formidable one.

SOHIER: He was aware of these complications, wasn't he?

GLENN: He was aware of these complications and so I think that his speech at the UN

was misunderstood and people assumed that a big manned space cooperative venture with the Russians was in the offing. My attitude on this has been slightly different. Questions asked when I was in Japan are a good example. People asked why there couldn't be a little give-and-take with the Russians so that we could cooperate together in space. My answer was that our information was *already* completely open to the whole world. We had already given all information. There's no better way we can cooperate for we've already given every bit of information. If there is any cooperation it's going to have to come from the Russians, because we have already cooperated with everybody all over the world. I told him of these questions when we discussed my Japanese trip.

SOHIER: Did he ever talk to you about the lunar landing decision and its wisdom?

GLENN: Yes, he did, and of how important he felt it was.

SOHIER: Did he talk about why stake out this decade as the period of time in which to do it? Did he talk to you about whether you thought you could do it in this period of time?

GLENN: Yes, he was always interested in what time schedules we could hook on to these things, and I think he was possibly disappointed that we could not hook on some more definite time schedules to these things. In areas of research and development like this it's very difficult to ever set up the perfect time schedule and adhere to it.

[-24-]

SOHIER: These are things that he would ask you about?

GLENN: Yes, I don't ever remember being with him for any length of time that there wasn't something brought up about the time schedules and when we thought we could do so-and-so, some phase of the project.

SOHIER: Maybe you could discuss a little bit whether he talked about the military aspects of space. I don't mean so much the military space program as the military importance of what NASA was doing. Did he ever get into this subject or ask you what you felt its importance was?

GLENN: I remember he asked what I felt military uses of spacecraft could be. I don't remember exactly, but I think what I probably told him at that time were the two that are obvious—for communications and also for observation.

SOHIER: Maybe you could tell us about the last time you saw President Kennedy. Do you remember that?

GLENN: I believe it was just a brief stop to say hello when I passed him coming out of

the White House in September of 1963.

SOHIER: One final point: In terms of your discussions with President Kennedy, what do you feel was his assessment of the value of the space program and what it was achieving for this country? Have you got any general philosophical thoughts on that?

GLENN: As I mentioned earlier, I think his attitude on it changed a little as time went on. He started out looking at this pretty much as a competitive scientific race with the Russians. I think his attitude changed somewhat on this and he attached increasing importance to the scientific exploitation aspects, although I don't recall any specific statements in this regard.

[-25-]

SOHIER: In terms of space capability to push forward into exploration?

GLENN: Yes.

SOHIER: Thank you very much, Colonel Glenn.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-26-]

John Glenn Oral History Transcript  
Name Index

**A**

Akihito, 13

**B**

Blagonravov, Anatoli A., 18  
Bundy, McGeorge, 10

**C**

Callaghan, Richard L., 9  
Cooper, Gordon, 7, 13

**D**

DeOrsey, Leo, 11, 12  
Dryden, Hugh Latimer, 18

**E**

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 9  
Estes, Billie Sol, 22

**F**

Freeman, Orville L., 22  
Fugler, Bart, 19

**G**

Gilruth, Robert R., 2  
Glenn, Anna C. "Annie", 1, 13, 14, 20  
Glenn, Carolyn Ann, 1, 13, 14  
Glenn, John David "Dave", 1, 13, 14, 21, 22

**H**

Huss, Carl R., 4

**I**

Ikeda Hayato, 13

**J**

Johnson, Claudia Alta "Lady Bird", 17, 18  
Johnson, John A., 9  
Johnson, Lyndon B., 3, 17, 18

**K**

Kamanin, Nikolai Petrovich, 20  
Kennedy, Caoline Bouvier, 5  
Kennedy, Ethel Skakel, 8, 21  
Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 5, 16, 21  
Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14,  
17, 20, 21, 22, 25  
Kennedy, Robert F., 8, 10, 17  
Kraft, Christopher Columbus, Jr., 4

**L**

Lingle, Walter L., Jr., 9

**R**

Reischauer, Edwin O., 13, 14  
Reischauer, Haru M., 13  
Roberts, Tecwyn, 4

**S**

Salinger, Pierre E.G., 9  
Shepard, Alan B., 4, 19  
Shepard, Louise Brewer, 19, 20

**T**

Teague, Olin E., 11  
Titov, Gherman, 18, 19, 20  
Titov, Tamara, 18, 19, 20

**W**

Williams, Walter, 4



JOHN HERSCHEL GLENN, JR.

JUNE 1964

John H. Glenn, Jr., a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, was born July 18, 1921, in Cambridge, Ohio. As a child, he moved with his parents to New Concord, Ohio. Glenn was assigned to the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center in April 1959 after his selection as a Project Mercury Astronaut.

Glenn is 5 feet 10-1/2 inches tall, weighs 168 pounds, and has green eyes and red hair. His wife is the former Anna Margaret Castor, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. H. W. Castor of New Concord. The Glenns have two children: John David, born December 13, 1945, and Carolyn Ann, born March 19, 1947. Glenn's parents are Mr. and Mrs. John H. Glenn of New Concord.

On February 20, 1962, Glen piloted the Mercury-Atlas 6 "Friendship 7" spacecraft on the first manned orbital mission of the United States. Launched from Cape Canaveral (renamed Cape Kennedy), Florida, he completed a successful three-orbit mission around the earth, reaching a maximum altitude (apogee) of approximately 162 statute miles and an orbital velocity of approximately 17,500 miles per hour. Glenn's "Friendship 7" Mercury spacecraft landed in an area in the Atlantic approximately 800 miles southeast of Cape Kennedy in the vicinity of Grand Turk Island. He landed 41 miles west and 19 miles north of the planned impact point. The time of the flight from launch to impact was 4 hours, 55 minutes, and 23 seconds. Prior to his flight, Glenn had served as backup pilot for Astronauts Shepard and Grissom.

When the astronauts were given special assignments to ensure pilot input into the design and development of spacecraft and flight control systems in January 1963, Project Apollo became Glenn's specialty area.

Glenn attended primary and secondary schools in New Concord, where he also attended Muskingum College. He entered the Naval Aviation Cadet program in March 1942 and was graduated from this program and commissioned in the Marine Corps in 1943. After advanced training, he joined Marine Fighter Squadron 155 and spent a year flying F4U fighters in the Marshall Islands.

During his World War II service, he flew 59 combat missions. After the war, he was a member of Fighter Squadron 218 on North China patrol and had duty in Guam. From June 1948 to December 1950 Glenn was an instructor in advanced flight training at Corpus Christi, Texas. He then attended Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, Virginia. In Korea he flew 63 missions with Marine Fighter Squadron 311, and 27 missions while an exchange pilot with the Air Force in F-86 Sabrejets. In the last nine days of fighting in Korea, Glenn downed three MIG's in combat along the Yalu River.

After Korea, Glenn attended Test Pilot School at the Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River, Maryland. After graduation, he was project officer on a number of aircraft. He was assigned to the Fighter Design Branch of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics (now Bureau of Naval

Weapons) in Washington from November 1956 to April 1959, during which time he also attended the University of Maryland.

Glenn has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on five occasions, and holds the Air medal with 18 Clusters for his service during WW II and Korea. Glenn also holds the Navy Unite Commendation for service in Korea, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, the China Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the United nations Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, the Navy's Astronaut Wings, the Marine Corps' Astronaut Insignia, and the NASA Distinguished Service Medal.

In July 1957, while project officer of the F8U, he set a transcontinental speed record from Los Angeles to New York, spanning the country in 3 hours and 23 minutes. This was the first transcontinental flight to average supersonic speed.

Glenn received his B.S. degree in Engineering from Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio. Muskingum College also awarded Glenn an honorary Doctor of Science degree in Engineering. In 1963 he received an honorary Doctor of Engineering degree from Nihon University in Tokyo, Japan.

Glenn has more than 5,455 hours of flying time, including 1,900 hours in jet aircraft.

His hobbies are boating and water skiing.

Glenn resigned from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration on January 16, 1964.